

Supporting People with Down's Syndrome to Thrive

From Down's Syndrome Manchester

Down's Syndrome Manchester's vision...

An inclusive world, where every person with Down's syndrome is visible, supported and celebrated.

Every child is unique, bringing their own strengths, talents and personality to the classroom and home. With the right understanding and support, children with Down's syndrome can flourish socially, academically and emotionally.

By focusing on practical strategies and adopting a warm, inclusive approach, families and educators can help children with Down's syndrome build confidence and unlock their full potential. At the same time, education settings have the opportunity to develop and embed inclusive practices that benefit every learner.

Seeing the World Differently

Children with Down's syndrome often experience visual difficulties, even with glasses. Fine detail and sharp contrast can be harder to perceive, but this does not limit their ability to enjoy and engage with learning.

Helpful approaches:

- Use larger, bolder, more colourful print and materials.
- Bright, engaging games and resources capture attention and spark motivation.
- Incorporate visual learning tools such as *Numicon* to support mathematical understanding.
- Provide symbol-supported text or *Widgit* visuals to aid comprehension across subjects.

Growing Through Movement

Low muscle tone and flexible ligaments can make motor skill development slower. Fine motor tasks like writing may be more challenging, but movement also provides rich opportunities.

Helpful approaches:

- Encourage active play to strengthen muscles and coordination.
- Support feet when sitting to help posture and focus.

- Offer fun activities such as threading, building and playdough to build grip strength for handwriting and other fine motor skills.

Making Learning Manageable

Children with Down's syndrome may find it harder to store and process spoken information, particularly when too much is presented at once. They thrive when learning is broken into small, meaningful steps.

Helpful approaches:

- Use modelling and imitation to build on natural strengths.
- Allow extra time for thinking and responding.
- Break learning into simple steps for errorless learning and confidence building.
- Use visuals and Makaton to support understanding.
- Try hand-over-hand modelling as an effective teaching method.
- Start with one-step instructions, then build gradually to two-step and beyond.
- Provide structure with visual timetables, *Now/Next* boards and task strips.

Building Communication and Positive Behaviour

Children with Down's syndrome want to succeed. Behavioural challenges often occur when tasks feel overwhelming or unclear. Social opportunities are also vital to happiness and growth.

Helpful approaches:

- Consistently praise positive behaviour to build motivation and self-esteem.
- Support social interaction, especially during playtimes, to encourage friendships.
- Plan social interaction targets into classroom activities (e.g. turn-taking, requesting objects).
- Use visual prompts and social stories to clarify expectations.
- Reinforce routines and transitions with visual aids for calm and predictability.
- Provide a *finished box* or task list to support independence.

Listening with Care

Hearing difficulties, often caused by glue ear, are common and can affect speech and language development. Small adjustments can have a big impact.

Helpful approaches:

- Speak clearly, face-to-face, using gestures and expressive cues.
- Use Makaton alongside spoken language.
- Emphasise word beginnings and endings for clarity.
- Reinforce speech with visual supports to reduce auditory pressure.
- Minimise background noise and consider seating arrangements.

- Work with Teachers of the Deaf for tailored recommendations.

Celebrating Communication

Speech and language can be areas of challenge, but understanding is often much stronger than expressive skills. Recognising this empowers children to thrive.

Helpful approaches:

- Combine eye contact, careful listening, visuals and gestures for multiple communication pathways.
- Take a *whole communication approach*: speech, Makaton, and visual supports.
- Recognise, celebrate and validate all forms of communication, including gestures and visuals.
- Support literacy through a dual approach: phonics and sight-reading, tailored to individual strengths.
- Remember: Makaton is a bridge to expressive communication, not a replacement. Always use alongside verbal expression.

Training and Support

Down's Syndrome Manchester offers affordable, best-practice training for education professionals.

We want to help you provide the best care, support and opportunities for individuals with Down's syndrome.

- **Ask us about our training:** suzi@dsmanchester.org.uk
- **Refer families and individuals with confidence:** dsmanchester.org.uk